VISIT…

BASE OF OPERATIONS

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Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

INTRODUCTION

Base of Operations is a short adventure intended for four 5th-level characters. DMs can easily modify the adventure to suit higher- or lower-level adventurers, or larger or smaller parties of adventurers. Simply adding a few monsters to every encounter area makes the adventure more challenging for larger parties, and adding levels to any of the humanoids can make them more of a threat to high-level groups. For low-level adventurers, make the relationship between the two factions within Brightstone Keep more strained, and take away a few monsters from each group. You can remove levels from some of the humanoids in the adventure to make it a lower-level challenge, but it is important that the orc cleric (described in encounter area 8) still have the ability to animate the dead. Still, he can have fewer minions around him when encountered, and that makes him less of a challenge for a low-level party.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The PCs are not initially privy to all the background material, but they should know some of it if they are locals or if they can discover it without much trouble.

What the PCs know:

- Brightstone Keep is an abandoned castle about a day's march (for characters with an average speed of 30; mounted characters go faster, and small characters or those in heavy armor go slower) outside of the large town of Marikest. (DM's can use any large town in their campaigns instead of Marikest.)
- In the old days, Brightstone Keep guarded a mining settlement, but humanoids overran the area. Recently, an army drove back the humanoids and the people of Marikest hoped Brightstone Keep would be rebuilt and used to watch the frontier—but the army has moved on, leaving the keep unoccupied.
- The townsfolk worry that humanoids or other monsters will return to Brightstone Keep and use it as a base of operations to raid Marikest. The army's presence has kept the humanoids at bay so far, but everyone knows the wars have moved on.

What the PCs don't know:

- Brightstone Keep has already found new owners. An orc cleric by the name of Kurjan Sawtooth has rallied a small band of orcs and brought them to the keep.
- Kurjan has suborned two powerful trolls into his service and looks to recruit other monstrous allies in an effort to actually rebuild and occupy the keep—he is much more ambitious than previous owners of the keep.
- Kurjan is a necromancer, a worshiper of Wee Jas, and a creator of undead. He hopes to raid Marikest and its surrounding farms, animate the dead his followers bring back, and use them to take over the town and make its people his slaves.

What no one knows:

- Brightstone Keep got its name from the mines, and not because iron ore could be found there. Deep in the mines lie many valuable gemstones. Kurjan, who uses the mines mainly as a storage area for the undead he creates, has no knowledge of this, and would be overjoyed if he did (animating undead is an expensive proposition).

THE LARGE TOWN OF MARIKEST

Only a day's march from Brightstone Keep, Marikest finds itself uncomfortably near the frontier. Most of its able-bodied men and women went off with the army that recently departed, leaving it with only a small force of sheriffs to patrol the entire community. The large town follows the rules noted for a community of its size in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, Chapter 4.

Marikest (large town): Conventional; AL NG, 3000 gp limit; Assets, 150,000 gp; Population 3,300; Mixed (human 80, halfling 9, elf 5, dwarf 3, gnome 2, half-elf 1).

Authority Figures: Town Council Speaker Gerrard Ishkar (male human Ari8), Town Council members Hubrid Darkfather (male dwarf, Exp5 "blacksmith") and Sara Ty-Djarling (female half-elf, Brd8).

Important Characters: Reg Ty-Djarling, male elf, Rgr5 (sheriff); Lorren, male human Clr9 (Pelor/healer); Makkal of Psen, male dwarf Mnk3/Rog3 (adventurer)

Others: Sheriff's guards, War2 (30); Traders and Craftsmen, Exp3 (40); Rog3 (12); Rgr3 (2); Com1 (3210)

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Base of Operations is a site-based adventure that is designed to be either very brief (one or two sessions) or part of an ongoing campaign. Player characters have the opportunity to save a town from a horrible fate, rid the world of a vile necromancer, and find a little wealth in the meantime. Or, if the DM wishes, the adventure allows for player characters to set themselves up in their own "base of operations" and become permanent members of a community.

- Marikest: The starting point for the adventure, the PCs may learn a little more about Brightstone Keep's history and the townsfolk's fears here, and they might use it as a place to retreat once or twice if things go wrong for them in the field.
- The Road to the Keep: Fairly well marked (by the army that left a few months ago), this area attracts the occasional dangerous creature or party of brigands.
- Brightstone Keep: Inhabited by orcs, trolls, and a few other nasty creatures—not to mention some newly-created undead—this site provides the setting for the final battle.

CHARACTER HOOKS

Player characters can find Brightstone Keep easily, simply by following the Mountain Road out of Marikest to the northeast. The PCs can be drawn into the adventure by the following methods (which are mutually compatible, should the DM wish to employ different means for each character).

It's an Adventure: The PCs have heard of the army's departure and Marikest's concerns about rampaging humanoids and other monsters. They've heard Brightstone Keep may become a haven for evil again, and they wish to stop that from happening.

A Friend in Need: One of the sheriff's guards is an old friend (perhaps a retired adventuring companion or

former hireling) and contacts the PCs on the town's behalf. The sheriff, Reg Ty-Djarling, has lost nearly all his guards to the departing army and has his hands full keeping the peace around town. He has no guards to spare for an investigation of Brightstone Keep (even though the Town Council is extremely worried). He's willing to pay a group of adventurers 100 gp each (600 gp maximum) to go to the Keep, scout around, and report back with any useful information.

A Soldier's Tale: The PCs learn of Brightstone Keep while in a town other than Marikest. A drunken old soldier, recently stationed in Brightstone Keep ("a run-down, broken old castle if I ever saw one!") tells them a legend of fabulous treasure to be found in the mines behind and below the keep. He says that he actually went into the mines (completely against orders—the shafts are dangerous and unstable) and shows the PCs a large, uncut gem (worth about 50 gp) that he says he found there. Unfortunately, his unit was ordered out of the area before he could explore the mines any more.

INFORMATION GATHERING IN MARIKEST

The people of Marikest are still recovering from the departure of the army and haven't really gotten used to the idea that they are now on the frontier of civilized lands. Most who come to that realization either consider moving west (following the army) or go to the Town Council and demand that someone do something about the safety of their community. This information is common knowledge, and if the PCs spend an evening in any one of a number of taverns sprinkled throughout this community (there was an army here recently, after all), they'll hear it first hand.

Should anyone in the party actually seek information about Brightstone Keep, they can learn the following through the use of a few skills (or through roleplaying, at the DM's discretion):

- **Gather Information (DC 10):** Brightstone Keep originally housed about 100 troops. It sits on a hollow or a plateau partway up one of the larger mountains in the nearby range. From the towers of the keep, one has a commanding view of the entire valley around Marikest.
- **Gather Information (DC 15):** When the army pulled out of the area around Marikest, many of the most talented folk went with it—and a lot of "scum" stayed behind. Marikest's guards are concerned about a rise in crime, and banditry on the road is almost too much for them to handle.
- **Gather Information (DC 25):** A few people have gone out to Brightstone Keep in the last few weeks, and some of them haven't returned. Rumors of undead and ghosts walking the walls of the keep have started circulating through the town.
- **Listen (DC 20):** In a tavern, one (or more) of the PCs overhear a dwarf (Makkal of Psen; see "Additional Help" sidebar) and two men talking about a "raid" and how they should "stay away from the east quarter".

Talking to some of the important people of Marikest (particularly the Town Council, the Sheriff, and the Cleric of Pelor) reveals the mood of the town and the urgency they feel. The Council also has a map of Brightstone Keep they will show to anyone who appears serious about going out there and taking care of their problem. (The DM can decide if the PCs appear serious, or have them make a Diplomacy check at a DC of 10.) The DM can sketch a copy of the map included with this adventure; it was provided (in haste) by the sergeant in charge of the squad that manned the Keep during the army's occupation of the area. It should not give away too many details about Brightstone Keep except its general layout.

ADDITIONAL HELP

One way the DM can adjust the difficulty of this adventure is to provide a little added help to the PCs—or a small, added hindrance. This can come in the form of some of the NPCs found around the town. Use the NPC tables in Chapter 2 of the DMG to flesh out any of these characters.

Reg Ty-Djarling: If the PCs are seriously undermanned or underpowered, Reg could accompany them to Brightstone Keep. He should only come along if the DM feels the PCs will be completely overmatched without his aid, however, as he is a 5th-level character and has a connection with the cleric of the town (either his wife or his sister; DM's choice). If the PCs only need a bit of a boost, he might be persuaded to hire out one of his 3rd-level lieutenants.

Makkal of Psen: Makkal, on the other hand, is an added "wrinkle" the DM may want to throw into the plot. He is a spy for the local brigands with an eye toward power of his own. He cannot abide orcs and hopes to see Kurjan defeated, but he wants to explore the mines and take the keep for himself. If the DM wants to add some intrigue to the adventure, have the lawful evil Makkal accompany the PCs and try to put them in a position where they and Kurjan destroy each other.

ON THE ROAD

Once the PCs decide to go to Brightstone Keep, the DM can either hurry them through the wilderness along the well-marked road, or throw in a few travelling encounters. If the PCs need a little more XP before they are ready to face Kurjan and his band, throw in a few CR 3 and CR 4 encounters along the road. If they are perhaps too tough, you might choose to wear them down a little with encounters of the same level—not enough to make them turn back or rest before arriving at the keep, but enough to deplete a few resources.

Use the tables in the back of the *Monster Manual,* "Monsters Ranked by Challenge Ratings," to design any additional encounters you feel are necessary. Dire animals, wolves, and magical beasts all inhabit the lands around the keep, and they are just starting to emerge from hiding—hungry—after the departure of the army. As mentioned above, small groups of deserters have become brigands on the road, and it is also possible a few of Kurjan's undead may have gotten loose.

BRIGHTSTONE KEEP

Built many years ago to protect a small mining concern, Brightstone Keep was just too far out on the frontier for anyone to protect when the wars began. As a result, it was assaulted, overrun by evil humanoids, and abandoned. Recently, the armies of civilization drove back the creatures that occupied the Keep, but it still has that same old problem—location, location, location.

To a rising young orc necromancer named Kurjan Sawtooth, Brightstone Keep is located in the perfect place. On the edge of civilization, it will provide him a perfect stepping-stone into power. With a small band of humanoids at his beck and call, a few trollish allies, and the magical ability to animate undead, Kurjan is ready to rise to true power.

Should the PCs approach the keep during the daytime, they see it long before they actually reach it.

> A high mountain rises before you. Its snow-tipped peaks look high enough to touch the clouds, but the road winds up its ever-steepening slopes until the path reaches a plateau, sheltered beneath the mountain's shoulders. There, tiny against the backdrop of stone and ice, lies Brightstone Keep.

Approaching Brightstone Keep is a task that must be done carefully. If the PCs choose to climb the mountain road up to the plateau, they walk right into the teeth of the keep's defenses—but they may not think of any other way.

Cimbing: To either side of the man-made ramp leading up to the plateau is a sharp drop. The lower cliff walls are extremely steep and not at all easy to traverse (Climb DC 30 because the natural rock is slippery). The orcs in the guard towers (see encounter areas 1, 2, and 3) have an additional –2 modifier to Spot them (plus distance modifiers), and certain towers may be shielded from sight. For example, if the PCs climb up the cliff to the east of the road, only the orcs in Tower #3 have any chance of noticing them.

Should the PCs try climbing up the mountain and descending toward the keep, the Climb DC is 15 on the way up the sides of the mountain, but 30 when descending to the plateau. It is possible the orcs from Towers #1 and #3 might see them doing this (such a climb would take a long time), but Spot checks would be made at a –4 (plus distance modifiers).

Flying: If the PCs are high enough level to cast the *fly* spell, or if they have other means of flying, they can approach the keep from just about any angle. They can also be seen from a variety of angles, and the DM will have to judge how easy or hard it will be for the orcs to Spot them.

Walking: Oddly enough, the walking approach isn't all that terrible. The orcs in Towers #2 and #3 aren't expecting anyone to come out of the west (unless the DM wishes to employ the "Makkal of Psen" option and he somehow sneaks off to warn them).

ENCOUNTER AREAS

Humanoids lurk in every section of Brightstone Keep, but there are a finite number of enemies for the PCs to face.

1-3. The Towers (EL 5)

Each tower has three levels: a ground floor, a middle floor, and a top floor or roof. Built to house active guards for the keep, the orcs inhabiting these structures have turned them into squalid living areas. The ground and second floor areas each have arrow slits that look outside the keep, and the top floor is protected by a crenelated wall (but no roof).

Creatures: Eight orc guards man each tower, and each tower is commanded by an orc sergeant (War3). During the daytime, one or two orcs stand miserably on the tower roof, squinting in the sunlight, while the rest of the orcs sleep inside the towers. At night, two more watchful sentries man each tower and the rest of the orcs can be found anywhere within the towers, on the walls, or in the courtyard. At least one sergeant patrols the walls at this time, keeping the guards on their toes.

All the towers are well-stocked with javelins (at least 48 in each tower), and any guards on wall patrol or at the top of the towers have at least two on hand.

Orc guards (24): hp 6 (x6), 4 (x12), 2 (x6)

Orc sergeants (3): hp 26, 23, 20

The orcs all have standard personal treasure. The sergeants each have a *potion of cure light wounds* in addition to whatever other treasure they are carrying.

If the PCs manage to get into one of the towers (especially during the daytime), it is unlikely that even a loud fight will draw the orcs from the other towers. The orcs often fight amongst themselves, and each sergeant has learned not to "butt in" during territorial disputes. If a fight goes on for a long time, or something untoward happens (pyrotechnics or loud noises caused by spells), a runner from one of the uninvolved towers will go to area #4 or #5 to inform the troll lieutenants. Either troll has enough power to threaten any remaining orcs into joining together and assaulting invaders.

4. & 5. The Buildings (EL 5)

Once used as homes for the workers in the mines and guards for the keep, these two-story buildings have become prisons for slaves of Kurjan and his troll lieutenants. Mixed among the two dozen goblins in residence are five humans, four dwarves, three halflings, and one elf. Unless the DM needs to adjust the challenge level of this adventure, these miserable people (goblins and non-goblins alike) are noncombatants. The goblins might be intimidated into fighting on the side of the trolls or the orcs (if the party gives the occupants of the keep enough warning), but it is unlikely they will prove much of a challenge to anyone.

The slaves spend their nights laboring in the mines, during which time the trolls can move about the castle or relax in their buildings. The slaves sleep during the days, chained up and half-guarded by the trolls.

Creatures: Trolls (2), hp 70, 57.

Treasure: Each troll has, in addition to standard treasure, a special item. The smaller of the trolls wears a *+1 chain shirt* while the larger wears a *ring of elemental resistance (fire, minor)*.

If attacked individually, the trolls will fight individually. They will order goblin slaves to warn Kurjan (in the Mine Entrance, area #8), but even if a goblin slave escapes the PCs it has only a 50% chance of warning Kurjan (roll for each goblin separately; they run off otherwise). Every round a fight goes on in one of the building, the DM should make Listen checks for the troll in the other building and the orcs (allowing for distance and for the fight being indoors). If one troll hears something going on in the other building, there's a 50% chance he ignores any such noise. On subsequent rounds, this chance decreased by 5% until he sends a goblin to investigate. If the goblin does not report back (or reports trouble), the troll from one building will come and help the other.

6. The Overlook

This high platform was built for two reasons: First, it served as a shelter for draft animals and wagons once used at Brightstone Keep (there are no more draft animals in residence and the army took any wagons it brought to the area), and second, it provides an additional watch platform for sentries and archers.

If a fight breaks out in the courtyard, or even in one of the towers or along the walls, look for at least some of the orc archers to head to the overlook with javelins and hurl them at invaders below. The overlook has no side walls but provides excellent cover opportunities for those on its surface—move away

from the edge and attackers on the ground can't see you, let alone attack you.

7. The Courtyard (EL 5)

The courtyard is a mass of rock and mud. Broken wagons, tools, and other trash litter the area. The most notable feature is a deep well in the center … with a winter wolf chained to it.

The wolf was captured by one of the trolls and taken in as a pet and a guard. The wolf is angry and miserable, but knows it has to obey the trolls or it won't survive. The trolls keep it well-fed and occasionally talk to it (though neither has much to say to each other, the winter wolf can speak the Giant tongue), but there is no friendship between them.

Creature: Winter wolf (1): hp 51

The wolf's chain is thirty feet long and fixed on a crank—anyone on the crank must beat the wolf's Strength check to tighten the chain. During the night, when the orcs want exercise, the trolls shorten the chain to around ten feet in length—unless they want to surprise the orcs.

The winter wolf will fight anyone who appears in the courtyard unprotected by the trolls. It has a 50% chance of attacking any orc that comes within reach (though it saves its frost breath for larger prey). There is also a small chance that it will try to negotiate with anyone it thinks can set it free.

8. The Mine Entrance (EL 7)

This large, cavernous opening leads to a series of mines built into the cliff face behind the keep. It is covered by a strong gate with a chain lock (DC 20 to pick). The only key stays inside the cave with the necromancer Kurjan Sawtooth.

Kurjan is an orc cleric of Wee Jas who desires the power that death can bring to him. He has successfully allied his small war-band with two powerful trolls and taken over Brightstone Keep. Now, he's using the gifts of Wee Jas to create and command undead to guard his slaves and build his army.

Creatures: Kurjan Sawtooth lives inside this cave area, along with several zombies and skeletons he has created. During the night, his undead minions supervise the slaves as they work in the mines. At the first sign of trouble, Kurjan casts *desecrate* and makes it more difficult for anyone to turn his most loyal followers.

Kurjan Sawtooth, male orc Clr6: CR 6; Medium Humanoid (6-ft. tall); HD 6d8+12; hp 45; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.(plate mail); AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18; Atk +8 melee (1d12+4, *+1 greataxe*; SA spells; AL LE; SV Fort +7, Ref +2, Will +7; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Spellcraft +9, Concentration +12; Martial weapon proficiency (greataxe), Extra Turning (+4 attempts per day), Power Attack.

Possessions: +1 greataxe, *+1 half plate*, *wand of magic missile,* 3rd-level caster (15 charges).

Spells Prepared (5/5/5/3): 0—*cure minor wounds, inflict minor wounds* (2), *read magic, resistance*; 1st—*cause fear*, bane, command, deathwatch (2)*; 2nd—*death knell*, death knell, cure moderate wounds, desecrate, hold person;* 3rd—*animate dead*, bestow curse, speak with dead, summon monster III*

*Domain Spells. Domains: Death (death touch once per day); Magic (use scrolls, wands, and other devices as 3rd-level wizard).

Zombies (4): hp 16, 16, 16

Skeletons (3): hp 6, 6, 6

Treasure: Most of Kurjan's treasure has been sunk into his plans, or lies in a chest not far from the cave entrance. Kurjan has roughly 1500 gp worth of uncut gemstones to add to the other loot the PCs find in the area.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

There are several avenues to explore once Kurjan and his forces have been defeated. The following are just a few suggestions:

- **Become lords of the manor:** No one else is claiming Brightstone Keep. If the PCs wish to turn it into a base of operations for their strikes into the frontier, it won't be hard to do. The mine is no where near played out, and if the PCs want to hire a manager from the nearby town, they can make fixing up the keep and using the mine a break-even proposition without too much trouble. The DM can use further adventures around Brightstone Keep to help the PCs develop a rapport with the locals and a vested interest in the area.
- **Exploring the mine:** Maybe Kurjan wasn't in Brightstone Keep just because of its nearness to the town—perhaps there's something down below the keep that caught his interest. It is possible that the mine complex was abandoned not because of humanoid invasions, but because the original miners found something far more deadly below the mountain than a few cave-ins.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Creative Director of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, Ed (or Ted, or T'Ed, depending on who you talk to) started at West End Games in 1991, came to TSR in 1995, and ventured out to the Great Northwest (and Wizards of the Coast) in 1997. You may know his work from the Birthright or ALTERNITY lines, or you might see his short D&D adventure, "Evil Unearthed," appearing in the August 2000 *DUNGEON* magazine. Now that the new D&D game is out, Ed thinks he should finally be able to get some sleep.